Art as Dramatization
Author(s): Richard Shusterman
Reviewed work(s):
Source: *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 363-372
Published by: Blackwell Publishing on behalf of The American Society for Aesthetics
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/432289
Accessed: 20/12/2011 10:46

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Blackwell Publishing and *The American Society for Aesthetics* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism.*

http://www.jstor.org

RICHARD SHUSTERMAN

Art as Dramatization

I

"Dramatise, dramatise!" was the insistent cry that haunted Henry James's artistic genius.[1] The celebrated novelist knew himself a failure in the theatre; his plays were almost all rejected for production, and one of the only two produced was roundly booed on the London stage. Yet James realized, with brave honesty, that the basic principle of drama nonetheless held the key to artistic greatness. Distinguishing nicely between the terms "Theatre-stuff" and "Drama-stuff"—between concrete stage performance and what he called the deeper "divine principle of the Scenario" (equally realizable in novels, films, and television), James turned that essential dramatic principle more consciously to work in composing the later works of fiction that crown his great career: "The scenic method," he wrote, "is my absolute, my imperative, my *only* salvation." That salvation is evident in his posthumous dramatic success, in the frequent adaptations of his fiction into TV dramas and films, and even into two operas by Benjamin Britten.[2]

James's assertion of the drama's superiority could have rested on ancient philosophical authority, but it was also not uncommon in his own time, and after. Nietzsche, for example, just a year younger than James, was quick to affirm Richard Wagner's recognition that "the greatest influence of all the arts could be exercised through the theatre."[3] Some generations later, James's native countryman and fellow Anglophile, T. S. Eliot, would reaffirm the supremacy of drama as "the ideal medium for poetry." Combining the power of meaningful action with the beauty of musical order, poetic drama could capture two exquisitely precious and different kinds of aesthetic value not easily synthesized in a single form. And through its theatrical performance, Eliot further argued, drama enabled the poet to reach "as large and as miscellaneous an audience as possible."[4] Eliot therefore made his own sustained efforts to write for the theatre, where, however, he enjoyed only little more initial success than James. (The Broadway hit *Cats*, though based on Eliot's light verse, is a posthumous dramatization of poetry that he in fact never intended for theatre, let alone musical theatre.)

Considered from the point of view of practicing artists (rather than that of philosophers), drama's preeminence derives not only from its presumed ability to reach more people and move them more powerfully and completely than other arts (something that may be truer today for cinema than for theatre). There is also (dare I say it as an American) the charm that a successful theatre play could bring in the quickest (if not always, ultimately) the greatest income to its author. We know from private correspondence that money was certainly one motive for James's interest in writing for the theatre. But the presence of this motive in no way falsifies the sincerity of his adulation of drama, which he praised as "the noblest" of arts, long before he ever seriously thought of a career in playwriting. James thought drama was noblest because it was the most challenging—combining the gravest formal demands of "masterly structure" with the highest requirement of significance of "subject."[5]

In this paper, I want to go beyond these more familiar assertions of drama's preeminent influence and nobility in order to suggest that the concept of drama embodies and unites two of the deepest, most important conditions of art

and may therefore hold the key to a useful definition of art as a whole.

But what is a useful definition of art? We may never entirely agree what this is, but we should at least realize that it can be something very different from what is typically taken and sought as a formally valid and true definition of art. Such a true definition of art is usually construed in terms of a set of essential properties that jointly belong to all artworks and only to them or in terms of conditions that are jointly necessary and sufficient for something to be an artwork. The avowed purpose of such formal definitions is "to tell us what is the extension of 'art.' It implies no more."[6] Whether we could ever provide such a definition that not only will accurately and decisively demarcate the current extension of art but that will continue to hold for all future artworks continues to be a very controversial issue. Recurrent dissatisfaction with the definitions offered, together with a perception of art's volatile history and irrepressible impulse to challenge defining limits in questing for radically new forms, have combined to make many (and not only radical antiessentialists) doubt that we can presently come up with such a definition that will be satisfactory for all times. Some have therefore limited their definitional efforts to proposing procedures for identifying artworks and thus determining art's extension in that way. Others remain committed to the project of real or true definition and thus ingeniously conjure up complex defining formulae that aim to be flexible, general, vague, and multioptional enough (in pointing to a disjunctive set of overarching functions, procedures, or historical relations of artworks and art practices) that they will be able to cover all possible artworks of the future. Whether or not such definitions are successful in perfect and permanent coverage of art's extension is not what concerns me. I am more concerned with whether a definition of art is useful in improving our understanding and experience of art by illuminating what is important in art, by explaining how art achieves its effect, or by taking a stand in the controversial struggles over art's meaning, value, and future.

A definition can be useful for aesthetics without being true in the formal sense of accurately delimiting the current extension of art. For instance, an honorific definition of art that was confined to meritorious works would be obviously false to the accepted extension of the concept of art and would be logically problematic in apparently precluding the notion of bad art. But, if it were accurate in picking out what is good art or what is good in good art, then such a faulty definition would be far more useful for aesthetic purposes than truer definitions of art that succeed better in the aim of faithful coverage by equally covering art that is bad or indifferent. From my pragmatist perspective, it is usually more important for definitions and beliefs in aesthetics to be useful than to be formally true (though the two may sometimes coincide). For this reason, in *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, though I criticized Dewey's definition of art as experience for being a hopelessly inaccurate definition of art, I also argued that his definition was aesthetically more useful than another pragmatist option of definition that seems eminently more accurate and valid in the sense of conceptual coverage—art as a historically defined and socially entrenched practice.[7]

If the value of a definition of art is in its contribution to our understanding and experience of art, then there are several forms this service can take. Definitions can be useful for recommending evaluative standards for art. Thus Morris Weitz argued that though real definitions of art were impossible or wrongheaded, "honorific definitions" of art could nonetheless be valuable as "recommendations to concentrate on certain criteria of excellence in art."[8] But I would argue that nonhonorific definitions can also be useful and not only for the "criteria of evaluation" that Weitz stresses. Such definitions can serve to emphasize certain features of art that may not be receiving enough attention, thus resulting in an impoverishing of aesthetic experience and understanding. They may also help us bring together various aspects of art into a more perspicuous constellation, by combining features or reconciling orientations that otherwise seem uncomfortably unconnected or even in conflict.

So if the value of a definition of art depends on its capacity to improve our understanding and appreciation of art, what use could there be in defining art as dramatization? It would be wonderful if this definition turned out to capture and highlight some enduringly important and distinctive feature of art. But I shall begin more modestly, by arguing that this definition is, at

least, useful in integrating and thus reconciling the two most potent general orientations that dominate and polarize contemporary aesthetics. We can call them naturalism and historicism.[9]

II

Naturalism defines art as something so deeply rooted in human nature that it finds expression, in one form or another, in virtually every culture. This view, which is at least as old as Aristotle, sees art as arising from natural human needs and drives: a natural inclination toward mimesis, a natural desire for balance, form, or meaningful expression, a thirst for a kind of enhanced, aesthetic experience that gives the live creature not only pleasure but a more vivid, heightened sense of living.[10] Art, it argues, is not only deeply grounded in natural forces, energies, and rhythms, but is also an important tool for the survival and perfection of human nature; hence, for many proponents of aesthetic naturalism, the highest art, the most compelling drama, is the art of living.[11] Even when art is significantly shaped by the societies, cultures, and specialized frameworks in which it is situated, the naturalists insist that art—at its best, truest, and most potent—expresses the fullness and power of life.

This line of aesthetic naturalism made its mark in German philosophy through Friedrich Nietzsche. In his early study of drama's origins in ancient Greece, Nietzsche argues that art was born of natural roots, an expression of "overflowing life" or "lively action" arising from "the innermost ground of man," "even from the very depths of Nature" and deriving its power "from an overflowing health" or "fullness of Being" (30, 51, 57, 86; Eng. 4, 22, 29, 55).[12] The heightened experience of aesthetic ecstasy, which Nietzsche traces from early Greek tragedy back to the religious frenzy of the Dionysians, is championed as "the highest, namely Dionysian expression of Nature." In contrast, he condemns "the culture of Opera" and its "stilo rappresentativo" as "something so completely unnatural" (88, 151–152; Eng. 57, 113–114). Emerging from the deepest wells of Nature, true art celebrates through its "aesthetic delight" the principle of "eternal life beyond all appearance and despite all destruction." For Nietzsche, then, "art is not simply an imitation of nature, but its metaphysical supplement," a "justification of the world" "as an aesthetic phenomenon" (138, 186–187; Eng. 101–102; 142–143).

John Dewey developed pragmatist aesthetics by plying a similar doctrine of naturalism, insisting that "art—the mode of activity charged with meaning capable of immediately enjoyed possession—is the culmination of nature," while "'science' [itself an art of sorts] is properly a handmaiden that conducts natural events to this happy issue."[13] Dewey's *Art as Experience* begins with a chapter entitled "The Live Creature," and the book is largely aimed at "recovering the continuity of aesthetic experience with normal processes of living" (16). Aesthetic understanding, Dewey urges, must never forget that the roots of art and beauty lie in the "basic vital functions," "the biological commonplaces" man shares with "bird and beast" (19–20). Even in our most sophisticated fine arts that seem most removed from nature, "the organic substratum remains as the quickening and deep foundation," the sustaining source of the emotional energies of art whose true aim "is to serve the whole creature in his unified vitality." "Underneath the rhythm of every art and of every work of art, there lies," Dewey concludes, "the basic pattern of relations of the live creature to his environment," so that "naturalism in the broadest and deepest sense of nature is a necessity of all great art" (155–156).

The impassioned aesthetic naturalisms of both Nietzsche and Dewey share a common but insufficiently acknowledged source in Ralph Waldo Emerson, the transcendentalist prophet who ardently (and everywhere) preached the gospel of nature in all its manifold forms, uses, and resplendent spirituality. Art is just one example. "Art" as Emerson defines it "is nature passed through the alembic of man."[14] Rather than serving art for art's sake, art's aim is to advance nature by enhancing the life of its human expression; thus "art should exhilarate" by engaging one's "whole energy" and serving fully "the functions of life." "There is higher work for Art than the arts," Emerson concludes. "Nothing less than the creation of man and nature is its end" (192–194).

Praising nature's gifts of beauteous forms and useful symbols for both art and ordinary language, Emerson anticipates Dewey's argument that art takes its very forms and symbols from our natural environment: for example, the

pointed style of Gothic architecture from the forest's towering trees. Emerson likewise prefigures the celebration of the intense sublimity of aesthetic experience that both Dewey and Nietzsche later emphasize as the highest achievement of culture, peak experiences that are more profoundly transformative and creatively insightful than any discursive truth of science. "The poet gives us the eminent experiences only—a god stepping from peak to peak." "Poetry," Emerson continues (in a phrase that Nietzsche made more famous) "is the *gai science* . . . and the poet a truer logician" one "who unlocks our chains and admits us to a new scene" (443, 455–456).

The aesthetic naturalism of these philosophers is more than romantic sentimentalism. Contemporary science lends it significant support. Evolutionary researchers now recognize that, by and large, the things that naturally give us pleasure are good for the survival and growth of our species, since we have survived and evolved not by conscious planning, but by making the choices that natural pleasures have unreflectively drawn us to. The intense pleasures of sex, for example, impel us toward procreation for the survival of the species, even if it is not in the individual's rational best interest to take the risks involved in such dangerously close encounters. Art's beauty and pleasures, it can be argued, have evolutionary value not only for sharpening our perception, manual skill, and sense of structure, but also for creating meaningful images that help bind separate individuals into an organic community through their shared appreciation of symbolic forms.

Finally, art's pleasures—by their very pleasure—have evolutionary value in that they make life seem worth living, which is the best guarantee that we will do our best to survive. The long survival of art itself, its passionate pursuit despite poverty and oppression, and its pervasively powerful transcultural presence can all be explained by such naturalistic roots. For, as Emerson, Nietzsche, Dewey, and other life-affirming aestheticians have realized, there is something in the vividness and intensity of art's aesthetic experience that heightens our natural vitality by responding to deeply embodied human needs.

The quickening, transformative power of aesthetic experience that the naturalists stress as art's energizing core need not be confined to wholly positive experiences of unity and pleasure, as my quotes from Emerson, Nietzsche, and Dewey might suggest. Naturalism extends beyond happy affirmations of organic wholeness, since nature not only unifies but also disturbs and divides. Fragmentation and vivid encounters with disagreeable resistance can also stimulate an invigorating, life-enhancing aesthetic experience, as theorists of the sublime have long recognized. If contemporary art's most intense experiences often belong to this disruptive yet vitally exciting kind, then an updated naturalism can accommodate such an aesthetics of resistance that prizes art for its ability to disturb and oppose social conventions through its experiential power of defiance, even if that oppositional power also partly relies on social conventions.

In critical contrast to aesthetic naturalism, historicism defines the concept of art more narrowly as a particular historical cultural institution produced by the Western project of modernity. Partisans of this view construe earlier and non-European artistic forms not as *art proper* but as objects of craft, ritual, or tradition that at best are precursors or imperfect analogues of autonomous art. The historicists stress the point that our current concepts of fine art and aesthetic experience did not really begin to take definite shape until the eighteenth century[15] and that they only achieved their present "autonomous" form through social developments of the nineteenth century that established the modern institution of fine art and that culminated in the turn-of-the-century notion of "art for art's sake." In the words of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, probably the most rigorous and systematic of today's aesthetic historicists, it is not at all in nature that "the foundation of the aesthetic attitude and of the work of art . . . is truly located [but rather] . . . in the *history* of the artistic institution," which creates the very "*social conditions of possibility*" for art and aesthetic experience. Thus, "although appearing to be a gift from nature, the eye of the twentieth-century art lover is really a product of history."[16]

Twentieth-century art, the historicist argument continues, has taken this autonomy and turned art into its own preeminent purpose and its own prime subject matter. Just as art is held to be the product of its sociohistorical differentiation from real-world contexts, so art's meaning and value are seen as constituted simply by the

institutional setting that distinguishes art from the rest of life. It is, of course, the sociohistorical institutional setting that makes a readymade object into a work of art and distinguishes it from its ordinary nonartistic counterpart. Museums, galleries, and other art institutions do not, therefore, simply display art; they help create the social space without which art cannot even be properly constituted as such.

Bourdieu is joined by the analytic philosophers Arthur Danto and George Dickie in stressing this point. These and like-minded historicists therefore conclude that it is only through the historically changing social framework of the artworld that an object becomes an artwork; its status as such, therefore, depends not at all on beauty, satisfying form, or pleasurable aesthetic experience, which contemporary art has shown to be inessential, if not altogether *depassé*. Some historicists insist that even the seemingly wider notions of aesthetic object and aesthetic enjoyment (without the further, more distinctive claim of artistic status) are likewise determined by the historical institution of art, because that institution is held to have determined the general form that any aesthetic appreciation should take by having defined the very meaning of the aesthetic.

How, then, should we choose between naturalism and historicism? It seems folly to simply choose one of these polarized views, since each has severe limitations.[17] If the naturalistic view does not sufficiently account for the social institutions and historical conventions that structure art's practice and govern its reception, the sociohistorical view cannot adequately explain the ends for which art practices and institutions were developed, what human goods they are meant to serve, and why non-Western, nonmodern cultures also pursue what seem to be artistic practices. To define art simply as the product of modernity puts in question the deep historical continuities that constitute the tradition of Western art from Greek and Roman times through medieval and Renaissance art into the modern period where art is said to originate.

Another reason why we should not simply choose between aesthetic naturalism and historicist conventionalism, between lived experience and social institutions, is that these notions are as much interdependent as they are opposed. Our very notion of a natural language, which is nonetheless constituted by social conventions and history, shows the folly of the natural/sociohistorical dichotomy. Natural life without history is meaningless, just as history without life is impossible.

But if it seems foolish to choose between viewing art as natural and viewing it as nonnatural (since sociohistorical), there remains a troubling tension between the two approaches. Naturalism sees art's most valuable essence in the vivid intensity of its lived experience of beauty and meaning, in how it directly affects and stimulates by engaging themes that appeal most deeply to our human nature and interests. On the other hand, there is the historicist insistence that art's crucially defining feature has nothing at all to do with the vital nature of its experience, but rather resides in the historically constructed social framework that constitutes an object as art by presenting it as such and institutionally determining how it should be treated or experienced. On one side, we see the demand for experiential intensity and meaningful substance; on the other, we find the requirement of a social frame without which no artistic substance, hence no experience of art, seems possible.

III

I now want to propose that the idea of art as dramatization provides a way of reconciling the residual sense of conflict between these poles of aesthetic naturalism and sociohistorical contextualism by combining both these moments within its single concept. In contemporary English and German, there are two main meanings for the verb "to dramatise" or "*dramatisieren*" that parallel the two moments of experiential intensity and social frame. In its more technical meaning, to dramatize means to "put something on stage," to take some event or story and put it in the frame of a theatrical performance or the form of a play or scenario. This sense of "dramatize" highlights the fact that art is the putting of something into a frame, a particular context or stage that sets the work apart from the ordinary stream of life and thus marks it as art. Art is the staging or framing of scenes. The familiar French synonym for this sense of dramatize is, of course, "*mis en scène*," a convenient term that Nietzsche himself used in *Ecce Homo* to praise

the artistic genius of the Parisians: "Nowhere else does there exist such a passion in questions of form, this seriousness in *mis en scène*—it is the Parisian seriousness *par excellence*."[18]

But besides the idea of staging and framing, "dramatize" also has another main meaning, which suggests intensity. To "dramatise," says the *Chambers Dictionary*,[19] is "to treat something as, or make it seem, more exciting or important."[20] The *Duden Fremdwörterbuch* makes the same point for German: "dramatisieren" means "etwas lebhafter, aufregender darstellen." In this sense of art's dramatization, art distinguishes itself from ordinary reality not by its fictional frame of action but by its greater vividness of experience and action, through which art is opposed not to the concept of *life*, but rather to that which is lifeless and humdrum. Etymologically, our concept of drama derives from the Greek word "drama," whose primary meaning is a real deed or action, rather than a formal framing or staged performance. This suggests that drama's power derives, partly at least, not from the framing stage but from the stirring energy of intense action itself; for action is not only a necessity of life, but a feature that invigorates it. But how can we make sense of any action without grasping it through its framing context or situation?

I shall return to explore this intimate connection of action and place, but let me first underline the point already made: that dramatization effectively captures both moments—active intensity and structural frame—that the naturalist and contextualist theories respectively and contestingly advocate in defining art. The idea of art as dramatization may therefore serve as a handy formula for fullness, synthesis, and reconciliation of this longstanding and, I think, futile aesthetic debate.

To ensure that we are not building too much philosophy on the meaning of the single word "dramatization," let us turn to the synonym that many in Germany prefer to use: "Inszenierung," a term that clearly echoes the French term *mise en scène*. Both terms, of course, derive from the Latin scaena (the stage or scene of the theatre), which derives from the Greek σκηνή, whose primary meanings were not initially theatrical but rather generic designations of place: a covered place, a tent, a dwelling place, a temple. The concept of *mise en scène* or *Inszenierung*, with its direct invocation of scene as stage or place, seems to emphasize art's moment of frame rather than intensity of action or experience.

But we should not conclude that it therefore ignores this other moment that we found in the concept of drama. First, *mise en scène* implies that something significant is being framed or put in place; the scene of *mise en scène* is not a blandly neutral space, but the site where something important is happening. Even the very word "scene" has come to connote this sense of intensity. In colloquial speech, the "scene" denotes *not* just any random location, but, as one says in English, "where the action is." It denotes the focus of the most exciting things that are happening, for example, in the cultural life or nightlife of a city. To make a scene, in colloquial speech, is not simply to do something in a particular place but to display or provoke an excessive display of emotion or active disturbance. In short, just as the action of drama implies the frame of place, so the place of scene implies something vivid, vital, exciting that is framed. For similar reasons, the English word "situation" (in locutions like "We have a situation here") is now often used colloquially to suggest the heightened intensity of a disturbing problem (argument, accident, emergency, breakdown, etc.).

This reciprocity of heightened experience and specially significant place, we need to emphasize, is not a mere superficial linguistic coincidence of English and German. The notion of scene as the locus of the most intense experience goes back to the deepest ancient sources. Tellingly used by Euripides to denote a temple, the word *skene* (along with its derivative *skenoma*) also served as the ancient Greek term for the holy tabernacle of the Old Testament where God's presence was said to dwell. In the original Hebrew, the word for Tabernacle is *Mishkan* (מִשְׁכָּן), which is derived from the word for divine presence *Shechina* (שְׁכִינָה) sharing the trilittoral stem skn- (שכן), which means to dwell. Thus the scene of *skene* means not simply the place of a play but the dwelling of God, the sacred site of divine activity and experience, a locus of overwhelming exaltation. For, as the Bible repeatedly declares, "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle,"[21] exuding so much divine intensity that even the steady Moses was

overcome. This Hebrew *skene*, the *Mishkan*, was the theatre that God commanded Moses to build for Him from the voluntary donations of precious metals, cloth, and jewels collected from all the Hebrew people. Its crucial, sacred importance is witnessed through the detailed description of its complex construction and ornamentation, which fills the final six chapters of the book of Exodus. Thus, the divine roots of drama or *mise en scène*, its role as a holy locus of intense experience, is vividly present also in ancient Hebrew culture, not just in the Greek cult of Dionysus to which Nietzsche (a minister's son, after all) later pays tribute.

IV

Drama, as Aristotle long ago described it, is the presentation of heightened action within a well-structured formal frame of "a certain, definite magnitude," "a well-constructed plot" with a clear "beginning, middle, and end."[22] If the deep drama that defines art in general is a complex play of heightened experience and formal frame, then good art should ignore neither of these moments. To concentrate solely on the frame will eventually degenerate into bare and barren formalism where art remains alienated from the inspiring interests and energies of life. But to dismiss art's respect for cultivation of its frame because of a frantic lust for experiential intensity would threaten a parallel artistic wasteland: the empty clutter of shallow sensationalism devoid of any enduring form, so that we might eventually lose the very capacity to distinguish particular artworks from each other and from other things. Even those genres (such as performance art and happenings) that most effectively challenged the rigidity of art's separating frame nonetheless relied on some sense of this frame in order to claim their artistic status and give themselves the meaning they intended.

But if good art must be fundamentally dramatic in the double sense we have identified, viz., as intense experience captured and shaped within a special formal frame, how then do these two dimensions of drama—intensity of experience (in action or feeling) and formal staging—fit together? How compatible can they be? They *seem* to pull in different directions, especially when we accept the popular presumptions that lived fervor cannot tolerate formal staging and that art's distancing frame conversely subverts real-life intensity of affect and action. But art's power might be better understood by challenging these dogmas. So I shall conclude by arguing that the apparent tension between art's explosively vital life-feeling and its formal frame (a tension that underlies the conflict between aesthetic naturalism and artistic historicism) should be seen as no less productive and reciprocally reinforcing than the familiar tension between content and form to which it seems obviously related.

A frame is not simply an isolating barrier of what it encloses. Framing focuses its object, action, or feeling more clearly and thus sharpens, highlights, enlivens. Just as a magnifying glass heightens the sun's light and heat by the concentration of its refracting frame, so art's frame intensifies the power its experienced content wields on our affective life, rendering that content far more vivid and significant. But, conversely, the intensity of feeling or heightened sense of action that is framed reciprocally justifies the act of framing. We do not frame just anything. A frame with nothing in it would be unsatisfying, so that when we find an empty frame or plain white canvas hanging on a gallery wall, we automatically project a significant content onto the apparent emptiness, even if it be the interpretive content that art need have no other content but itself and its essential aspect of framing. Other arts can provide their own similar examples. Think of composer John Cage's famous *4'33"* or choreographer Paul Taylor's *Duet* (two dancers motionless on stage).

In short, just as action makes no sense without the notion of a framing place where the action occurs, so our sense of frame, place, or stage has the *prima facie* implication that some significant activity (recalling the original Greek root of drama) inhabits that frame. Great writers such as Henry James are therefore praised for rendering their fictional scenes so captivatingly vivid and real, not by providing intricately long descriptions of their physical setting (since such description can be tediously deadening), but instead through the compelling intensity of action that takes place within that setting, including the action of passionate thought and feeling. This lesson of aesthetic realism finds confirmation in the psychological theories of Henry's famous brother, the philosopher William James, who ar-

gues that our immediate sense of reality "means simply relation to our emotional and active life. . . . In this sense, whatever excites and stimulates our interest is real."[23]

Although art's dramatizing frame can heighten reality through its intensification of feeling, we must not forget the frame's other, contrasting function that is far more familiar to our thinking about art. A frame not only concentrates but also demarcates; it is thus simultaneously not just a focus but a barrier that separates what is framed from the rest of life. This important bracketing effect, which tends to "derealize" what is framed, not only helps explain the long aesthetic tradition of sharply contrasting art to reality but also forms the fulcrum for influential theories of aesthetic distance. This bracketing aspect of the frame clearly inspires aesthetic historicism, which, we saw, defines art and the aesthetic by their social differentiation from other realms, entirely in terms of the special historically constructed institutional framework that makes an object an artwork or renders its appreciation a distinctively aesthetic experience.

In this knot of productive tension that binds art's heightened experience to its formal staging, another strengthening strand should be noted. This further twist in drama's dialectical play of lived intensity and separating frame is that precisely the bracketing off of art from the ordinary space of life is what affords art its feeling of lived intensity and heightened reality. Because art's experience is framed in a realm alleged to be apart from the worrisome stakes of what we call real life, we feel much more free and secure in giving ourselves up to the most intense and vital feelings. As Aristotle already adumbrated in his theory of catharsis, art's frame permits us to feel even life's most disturbing passions more intensely, because we do so within a protected framework where the disruptive dangers of those passions can be contained and purged, so that neither the individual nor society will suffer serious damage.

Art's restraining frame thus paradoxically intensifies our passionate involvement by removing other inhibitions to lived intensity. Art's fictions are therefore often said to feel far more vividly real than much of what we commonly take as real life. It is as if art's bracketed diversion from ordinary reality allows us an indirect route to appreciate the real far more fully or profoundly by putting us somehow in touch with a reality that is at least greater in its experiential depths of vivid feeling. This argument seems prefigured in Nietzsche's famous praise of drama for piercing the everyday veil of solid, separate objects—an Appollonian dream-world of clear forms and distinctive persons governed by the "*principio individuationis*," so as to deliver our experience to the deeper Dionysian reality of frenzied "Oneness" and flux (138–139; Eng. 55–58), the ground reality of "omnipotent will behind individuation, eternal life continuing beyond all appearance and in spite of all destruction" (51, 138–139; Eng. 56, 101–102).

Some might protest that such arguments corrupt the very meaning of reality, which must be reserved for the world of ordinary life and kept absolutely distinct from the notion of art with its frame of staging—the sign of the unreal. To reply to such protests, one could invoke the constructed fictions and staged experiments that form the respected realities of science. But we should also note that the realities of everyday life are everywhere played out on the stages set by diverse institutional frames. Indeed, from certain lofty yet familiar perspectives, it seems that "All the world's a stage," as Shakespeare tells us, where life itself is but "a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more."[24] In the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry, one wonders whether art has so often been denigrated as a staged imitation of life because real life itself is modeled on dramatic performance.

I shall here not venture further into the question of the real nature of reality. This seems a hopeless question, partly because "reality" is an essentially contested concept, but also because it is based on a grammatical substantive derived from the very flexible adjective "real," which as J. L. Austin showed is so peculiarly variable and complexly contextual in usage that any attempt to find a significant common core that constitutes reality "is doomed to failure."[25] Instead, let me conclude by recalling the paradox that art's apparent diversion from real life may be a needed path of indirection that directs us back to experience life more fully through the infectious intensity of aesthetic experience and the release of affective inhibitions. This suggests that the long-established art/life dichotomy should not

be taken too rigidly, that we have here at best a functional distinction that surely seems to dissolve with the idea of the art of living.

But I think the logic of this paradox has still more radical implications for the defense of a concept far more despised than art for its frivolous diversion from reality—I refer to the term "entertainment," which past philosophers have often used to denigrate the dramatizations of opera but which now chiefly serves to condemn today's more popular artistic forms (including TV dramas such as Germany's *Tatort*, whose very title captures not only the deepest dimensions of art but the crucial practical and spatiotemporal dimensions of human life[26]). Etymology also reveals that the very meaning of "entertainment" (or its German term "Unterhaltung") concerns the maintenance of life. If entertainment's much-denounced diversions from real life serve, in fact, as necessary, valuable detours that enhance life's journey and help recharge the batteries of our human vehicle, then they may also (partly through these functions) allow us sometimes to perceive the world far more fully and deeply. From the findings of somatics and neurophysiology, we could make a cognitive case for the value of entertainment's relaxing diversions. On the basic sensorimotor level of perception, if we release from the stress of chronic voluntary muscular contractions, the increased muscle relaxation will allow for heightened sensitivity to stimuli and therefore provide for sharper perception and deeper learning. This particular line of argument calls for more detailed elaboration; it belongs to a larger project I call somaesthetics.[27] But the life-enhancing values of entertainment should be evident from the reader's own experience. They are even recognized by canny theorists who condemn entertainment as the dangerous antagonist of true culture and art.[28]

RICHARD SHUSTERMAN
Department of Philosophy
Temple University
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122

INTERNET: shusrich@astro.temple.edu

1. See Henry James, "Preface to 'The Altar of the Dead,'" in *The Art of the Novel* (New York: Scribners, 1934), p. 265. In this same preface, the variation "Dramatise it, dramatise it" is also thrice invoked, pp. 249, 251, and 260.

2. These quotes from Henry James are taken from the introductory essays of Leon Edel, in his edition of *The Complete Plays of Henry James* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 10, 62, and 64.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth," *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), sect. 8, p. 227.

4. T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber, 1964), pp. 152–153. See also his "Poetry and Drama," in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957), pp. 72–88.

5. *The Complete Plays of Henry James*, p. 34–35.

6. Robert Stecker, *Artworks: Definition, Meaning, Value* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), p. 14. Stecker nonetheless firmly advocates the need for such a philosophical definition of art, unilluminating as mere extensional coverage may be. Though he notes my objection that such definitions are not usefully informative (17), he does not really respond to this charge and the arguments that motivate it. In his attempt to escape the difficulties that plague functionalist, historical, and institutional definitions, Stecker offers a multifaceted disjunctive definition, "historical functionalism, or the four-factor theory," that combines elements of the three more basic definitional approaches. One theorist who sensibly prefers to set his sights not on a real definition of art but on a theory or "reliable method for identifying artworks" is Noël Carroll, who offers an historical theory in terms of "identifying narrative." See Noël Carroll, "Identifying Art," in Robert Yanal, ed., *Institutions of Art* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 3–38. A good overview of the major strategies in analytic philosophy's attempts at defining art can be found in Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Cornell University Press, 1991). The goal of defining the concept of art once and for all by a single set of necessary and sufficient conditions that neatly and helpfully divide all actual and possible objects into those that are art and those that are not art seems futilely problematic to me for a variety of reasons: the multiple meanings and uses of the term "art"; art's open, creative nature and its valued hence contested character; changing conceptions of art over history; and the very different and changing ways that art is deeply connected yet also distinguished from other practices in the different societies in which it is situated. For a more detailed critique of the value of such extension-coverage definitions, which I call "wrapper theories of art," see my *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992; 2nd ed., New York: Rowman & Littlefield), pp. 38–45.

7. Ibid., pp. 34–35 and 46–61.

8. Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15 (1956), pp. 27–35, citation p. 35.

9. I am, of course, aware that the terms "naturalism" and "historicism" have many different meanings in aesthetic theory, some of which are much more specific than the general meaning they bear in this paper.

10. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b: "It is clear that the general origin of poetry was due to two causes, each of them part of human nature. . . . Imitation, then being natural to us—as also the sense of harmony and rhythm, the metres being obviously species of rhythm—it was through their

original aptitude, and by a series of improvements for the most part gradual on their first efforts, that they created poetry out of their improvisations."

11. For more detailed argument of these themes, see *Pragmatist Aesthetics* and "The End of Aesthetic Experience," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55 (1997): 29–41.

12. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie, Friedrich Nietzsche, Werke*, Band 1 (Leipzig: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1930); translated by Francis Golffing as *The Birth of Tragedy* in *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Doubleday, 1956). I give page references to both editions but have sometimes used my own translation.

13. See John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), p. 269, and especially, *Art and Experience* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1987); page references to this work will appear parenthetically.

14. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. R. Poirier (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 12. Further quotes from Emerson in this paper are taken from other texts in this collection of his essays and poems, and their page numbers will be noted parenthetically.

15. See, for instance, the work of Paul O. Kristeller, "The Modern System of Art," *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 11 and 12 (1951, 1952), which is very frequently cited by analytic aestheticians.

16. See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Genesis of Pure Aesthetic," in Richard Shusterman, ed., *Analytic Aesthetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 148–149.

17. Another reason to resist choosing simply one of these dualist alternatives relates to a general principle of pragmatic pluralism that I call "the inclusive disjunctive stance." The familiar logical disjunction "either *p* or *q*" is here understood pluralistically to include either one or both alternatives (as it does in standard propositional logic and in the common occasions of everyday life where one can choose more than one thing, e.g., either wine or water or both). This is in contrast to the exclusive sense of "either/or" where one alternative strictly excludes the other, as indeed it sometimes does in life as well as logic. With pragmatism's inclusive stance, we should presume that alternative theories or values can somehow be reconciled until we are given good reasons why they are mutually exclusive. That seems the best way to keep the path of inquiry open and to maximize our goods. I defend this principle in the Introduction to the second edition of *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, x–xiii.

18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* in *Friedrich Nietzsche, Werke*, Band 5 (Leipzig: Alfred Kröner, Verlag, 1930), p. 326; or in R. J. Hollingdale's English translation (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 30.

19. *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* (Cambridge: Chambers, 1996).

20. This second sense of dramatize is very similar to the dominant contemporary meaning of the French verb "dramatiser" as emphasizing or exaggerating the importance or gravity or drama of an event. This meaning is seen as an extension of an older French usage of the term that conveys the idea of putting something into a form proper to drama, e.g., dramatizing a story. This more limited and technical meaning parallels the first sense of "dramatize" already noted in English and German. The French verb "dramatiser" was apparently first introduced in 1801 with respect to Shakespeare. For more details, see *Petit LaRousse* (Paris: LaRousse, 1959); *Dictionnaire historique de la langue francaise* (Paris: Robert, 1992), vol. 1; and *Trésor de la langue francaise* (Paris: CNRS, 1979), vol.7.

21. Exodus 40: 34, 36.

22. Aristotle, *Poetics*, chap. 7, 1450b.

23. William James, *Principles of Psychology*, 1890 (Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 924.

24. The quotes are from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* 2.7.139 and *Macbeth* 5.5.23.

25. J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 70.

26. This paper is based on a lecture originally given in German and entitled "Tatort: Kunst als Dramatisierung." "Tatort" (which is composed of the German words for "act" and "place") is the German term for "scene of the crime," but it is also the name of one of the most popular TV crime series on German television. My original German title thus highlights the paper's themes of action, frame, and entertainment in a special way. I thank the Frankfurt Opera for inviting me to deliver this paper as the Eröffnungsvortrag of their conference on "Aesthetik der Inszenierung" (March 2000). I am also grateful to Josef Fruchtl, Heidi Salaverria, Rita Felski, and Julie Van Camp for helpful comments.

27. See my account of somaesthetics in *Performing Live* (Cornell University Press, 2000), especially pp. 166–181.

28. Hannah Arendt, for example, though a severe critic of popular culture's entertainment, still recognizes entertainment's enormous value for life. She simply defines art and culture as something essentially opposed to ordinary "life," but instead related to what she designates (probably through Heidegger's influence) as "the world." See Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance," in *Between Past and Future: Six Essays in Political Thought* (New York: Viking, 1961), pp. 197–226. I provide further arguments for the value of the pleasures of entertainment in art in my "Come Back to Pleasure," in *Let's Entertain: Life's Guilty Pleasures* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2000), pp. 33–47.